

The Uprooting Of Your Suffering.

(summarised transcription)

Q: Ajahn, you have said many times that the problem is that we are affected by things in the first place. In other words, it is possible for us to suffer, to get angry, lustful, confused and so forth. Thus the goal is to not be affected by suffering in the first place, rather than to only manage the symptoms.

Nm: That's the fundamental difference I often try to highlight. The practice of the Dhamma is not supposed to help you deal with things that bother you, it's supposed to uproot your liability to being bothered by things in the first place. The Dhamma does not manage your suffering, it removes the possibility for you to suffer in the first place. So the goal for your practice is to not be affected by things to begin with. It's not about having a perfect management system that will always help you deal with whatever suffering arises.

And that's the problem already: suffering has arisen. You might be very skilled in dealing with it, but you are not skilled in not having it arise in the first place, and that's what should be your concern.

Q: When I get angry, I can find a method which can calm my mind.

Nm: That's how you start, you need to want to be free from anger to begin with and then inevitably your first effort will be how to manage and subdue the anger, but you mustn't confuse that for the actual practice of the Dhamma, which if done rightly will uproot the anger, so that there is no more burden for you to manage.

Q: Management is not the Dhamma.

Nm: It's an approximation of the Dhamma, but it's not the "one and only way" which results in purification of "being" (satipatthana), the way that removes all of the unwholesome. Management cannot do that, only that direct insight into what uproots suffering, greed, aversion, delusion works. The Dhamma is that direct, one and only path for uprooting the suffering, not the management of it.

The knowledge of overcoming liability to suffering, once and for all, is the Dhamma.

Q: I must then first recognise the fact that I am subject to suffering.

Nm: The wise man who leaves the household life for the homeless life, does so because he realises that he is prey to suffering. He knows it's inevitable. And you need to have that idea clarified so that you can see that it's the root of the problem. The problem is that suffering is possible, regardless of whether you are suffering now in regard to something particular. You

must realise that even if you spend your life avoiding major sufferings, the fact is that you are still liable to suffering, you still have to make the effort to try and avoid it.

The Buddha was neither sick, old nor dying when he saw a sick, old, and a dead person, the “divine messengers”, yet he knew that he was liable to those things, and that is what the issue is.

The difference in management or uprooting is recognising that, “ok there is no lust etc in my experience right now, therefore I am fine”. No, it's good that those things are not present, but is it possible for those non-arisen unwholesome things to arise? Can you address that now or are you waiting for tomorrow? That's the crossroads, are you headed in the direction of uprooting or management? Most people go down the road of management, thinking that they will deal with the problem when it arises, while failing to understand that the liability to future lust is already a problem *now*. You don't have to wait for a particular suffering to arise because the general liability to suffering is always present.

Is there a chance for non-manifested lust or aversion to manifest in my experience later? If you are not sure, that means that there is a chance, and that's the issue right now even if those things are not present.

It's a very common attitude for practitioners to think that if they are not lustful or angry most of the time, then they are doing fine. But if most of the time you are not lustful and angry, that means that lust and anger is still a possibility, which means you are just not acting out of anger as often as others but that's just because you learnt some management method and you are certainly not uprooting anything if you have the attitude that most of the time such things don't arise for you therefore all will be fine. If you ask yourself could they arise in the future and if the answer is yes, then you can know all is not well.

You have to train your mind to start seeing these possibilities of anger etc as actually present because they are actually present.

If your idea of “way out” of suffering is skillful management, that means that you need suffering to arise first. Management requires suffering to arise first in order to manage it, thus management cannot free you from that suffering, it can only deal with it once it has arisen, and that's the relatively subtle problem, peoples naturally tendency is to manage the problem to try get rid of it but there is this confusion which occurs, which is that through your management of suffering you experience less dukkha and then at the same time you start tacitly assuming and hoping that all you have to do is manage your suffering long enough and then somehow your liability to dukkha will disappear. But that liability will not just disappear or evaporate magically and that's the point, the only way that suffering will evaporate is if you evaporate it, if you understand the core of it, if you pull the thorn out as the Suttas often say. It won't come out by itself, you have to uproot it. If you keep managing it with the hope that somehow your liability will disappear, that means your practice revolves around wishful thinking and there is no direct insight, no knowledge of what needs to be done for freedom from ‘liability to suffer’/Dukkha.

You might do a method that calms you down from getting angry but that calmness is dependent on you maintaining those efforts in regards to what is bothering you and so when something changes whereby you do not have the ability to practice your calming method, you will be back where you started because your method was just a suppression of anger. And that's not inherently wrong to do in the beginning but it is wrong to adopt a view that management will uproot the unwholesome somehow magically.

The only way to uproot things is to directly see what uprooting is, and I just described what that is, which is to recognise that liability/possibility of anger, lust, delusion, suffering as the Dukkha right now. And you can only sustain that recognition if you are keeping the precepts and practicing sense restraint.

Q: So I want that possibility to be gone...

Nm: Then you have to understand where the dukkha is. Is the possibility in itself the dukkha? Is the unpleasant feeling that you have when you think these thoughts, is that the dukkha? Or is the dukkha the gratuitous resistance towards that mental displeasure?

You suffer because you resist discomfort even before the discomfort comes your way. You resist the thought of the possibility of discomfort here and now and that is why here and now you experience dukkha. That's why the Buddha did not say that feelings are the cause of dukkha, he said that craving in regard to what you feel is the cause of dukkha. So when you have a feeling and a thought about the present, future or past, it's your implicit attitude towards the feeling, either craving towards or away from it, that is why that experience is dukkha. And you would not see that if you haven't forced yourself to discern that that level of possibility of dukkha is dukkha right now, you would not have seen that if you were just fully bent on managing the dukkha as it arises, or managing the dukkha before it arises.

Even when people recognise the possibility of future dukkha, they can even take that as something to manage, thinking "I will do such and such so that these things will not happen to me", which carries the implicit view that dukkha is in those actual things or in your actual feelings, and you don't see that it's in your attitude towards these things, presently.

The relationship between craving and suffering is always simultaneously present.

You need to see that the suffering is the present liability to suffering, not wait for a particular symptom of suffering to arise so that you can manage it. If you are not seeing your liability that means you are not seeing where your craving is. You need to see the present dukkha first in order to see its present cause. To the extent dukkha is felt to that extent craving is present but if you are not seeing the dukkha then how can you see that which determines it.

A way you can reflect: "why are you entitled to not experience pain? Have you had a say in its arising? Can you prevent circumstances from becoming disagreeable in the future? Is that even

conceivable?" No, it's a complete fantasy which is rooted in this complete misconception of the problem being in these things happening to me and not in me implicitly resisting the idea of these things happening to me.

So how do you stop resisting the pain? How do you stop welcoming the pleasure? How do you remove craving?

By not trying to manage it and seeing it here and now already, and by sense restraint because you cannot possibly be welcoming the pleasure and just dealing with the unpleasant experiences when they arise, you can't just selectively choose which cravings you want. If there is any form of craving present means liability to suffering is present. So you have to abandon craving for pleasure in as much as you have to abandon craving against pain.

Pain appears, pleasure appears, you have no say in their arising, so why do you then constantly entertain the attitude of "I want this", "I don't want this", why do you go after the one and try to avoid the other? Where is that attitude rooted? Why are you doing that?

You do it because you want to avoid pain, because you do not know how to deal with dukkha, your existential discomfort. That's basically management in a nutshell, and that's why it's inherently wrong, even if you are doing the Dhamma, following the Buddha's instruction, if you are taking it as management, that means you are still maintaining the same attitude by which you suffer in the first place, which is "I can't handle this, I want to get rid of this" and that's the attitude of craving.

So can you withstand the pressure of a feeling? Can you withstand the pressure of a feeling if your physical behaviour is not kept in check? If you do not keep a lid on the lustful or angry outpours of your verbal or physical actions, can you possibly withstand things mentally? Not a chance.

How do you withstand the pressure? By withstanding it. How do you become stronger? By exposing yourself to things which will make you stronger. You train that strength out of which wisdom can arise, which is what enlightenment is.

Sense restraint is not optional, it's a necessary base which has to remain throughout. By not giving into the pressure, you get to outline what the actual problem is, which is your liability to future pressure and discomfort, and you can only see that by not trying to manage the pressure to get rid of the pressure.

